REVIEW ARTICLE

Cross-cultural dimensions of politeness in the case of Polish and English by Ewa Jakubowska. Pp. 117. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego. 1999.

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The book is an abridged version of Ewa Jakubowska's doctoral dissertation. The subject matter of the study is "the verbal realization of polite speech acts" (p. 11) and its aim – "to provide a pragmatic contrastive analysis of polite verbal behaviour in Polish and English" (p. 11 and p. 103) and to answer the question about cross-linguistic differences.

The book consists of three chapters (*1. Pragmatic background; 2. Methodology; 3. A contrastive analysis of some polite formulae in Polish and English*) which might suggest the potential usefulness of the book as (1) an introduction of basic terms in pragmatics; (2) an example of doing fieldwork in pragmatics and sociolinguistics; (3) a corpus of Polish and English pragmatic data.

1. Introduction

In the first chapter Jakubowska gives several definitions of pragmatics, understandably focusing on context as a crucial notion. She refers to Malinowski's (1923) *context of situation* and Fillmore's (1980) *situation* (unfortunately, the exact source of the quotation on the latter is not given). The author discusses the scope of pragmatics, contrasting it with semantics and sociolinguistics, and singles out the cross-cultural approach to the study of speech acts (*contrastive pragmatics*).

The next section of the introductory chapter is concerned with conversational discourse. The author gives definitions of the speech act as formulated within Austin's theory of speech acts (Austin 1975) and elaborated on by Searle (1979). She pays special attention to *indirect speech acts* as an important element of politeness, however, though she gives several references to various accounts of indirectness, some related notions (e.g. Gordon and Lakoff's "conversational postulates" (1975)) are merely mentioned but not explained (p. 19). Thus, the reader is left to his/her own devices trying to figure out how and why the author considers them relevant to her own analysis of polite discourse. Similarly, in Section 1.2.2. on conversational structure Jakubowska describes conversation as made up of encounters which in turn may be divided into phases and further into exchanges and moves, yet she hardly ever explicitly applies these units to the analysis of her data which follows later.

In the next section (1.2.4.), devoted to Grice's cooperative principle (Grice 1975), the author keeps referring to Grice's conversational maxims, however she fails to list and/or define them. This renders vague the example that Jakubowska gives of the speaker "flouting ... one of the maxims" (p. 23) and, in particular, leaves unclear the author's claim that politeness is "the major source of deviation from the rational efficiency postulated by the maxims" (p. 23).

One may wonder whether the book could potentially be useful as an introduction to pragmatics for students taking English-Polish contrastive grammar courses – I would not recommend it. Throughout the introductory chapter ("Pragmatic background") it is not clear why the author chooses to elaborate on certain notions from pragmatic theory while leaving other, I believe, crucial concepts without an explanation.

On the other hand, wherever a critical account of a theoretical issue is put forward, the author's commitment to a view is rarely explicitly stated (for example, in the account of Sperber and Wilson's (1986) relevance theory on pp. 23-24). The above features make the book neither informative nor critical.

2. Methodology

The data were obtained by means of several methods: observation of spontaneous conversation, introspection, elicitation tests and written sources.

Having deemed observation especially useful within an ethnographic approach, the author seems to consider as legitimate the method of collecting data by "making tape recordings with a hidden microphone" (p. 40). Labov (1984) disqualifies candid recording as problematic both from the ethical and the practical point of view (poor quality of data). Even when informants are told afterwards that they were recorded, the deceit will be damaging for further contacts with the speech community under study.

Milroy (1987) comments on surreptitious recording as unethical and Kasper (1999) does not even consider it a possibility while strongly recommending audio- and video-recording for collecting data on authentic discourse and discusses ways to overcome the problem of the observer effect (cf. the Observer's Paradox, Labov 1972).

Jakubowska herself, though she does not object to surreptitious recording, preferred to rely on taking notes and describing the relevant speech events. Excerpts from the corpus thus compiled are presented in *Appendix I: The data base*. However, only two out of several speech acts analysed are illustrated in the appendix (thanks and compliments), and no Polish language data are given.

Jakubowska's primary method of data elicitation was introspection: she first gathered preliminary information on the use of polite language by asking speakers to reflect upon typical usage. Later, a discourse completion test was used to elicit the informants' preferred choices of polite formulae. The English version of the test is reprinted in *Appendix II*. In fact it is not what the author says it is: "63 short incomplete dialogues in various situations" (p. 41); rather it is a list of various communicative settings and the informant is asked to respond (politely) to each trigger situ-

ation (e.g. "You want to pass through a crowded bus." p. 108). It is a pity that the appendix does not include even a sample of the test responses.

The author does indicate the limitations of such methods based on introspection (the results point to idealized rather than actual usage) however, she suggests it is a good way to establish a repertoire of possible forms. Furthermore, Kasper (1999) claims that production questionnaires are very useful in that they uncover the relationship between socio-pragmatic norms and the linguistic strategies selected.

The informants selected for the study were the following: 30 native speakers of English, all of them students at the University of Birmingham and 30 native speakers of Polish, students *of English* at the University of Silesia. It is apparent that such a choice of informants is highly questionable – in my opinion Polish students of English are very unreliable as informants in a Polish-English contrastive project as their verbal responses are likely to be affected by their FL competence and intensive exposure to English and the results are thus bound to be biased.

Kasper (1999) advocates the use of multiple, complementary data collection procedures in pragmatic research. This is what Jakubowska chose to do: her data are based on observation (with sources ranging from authentic discourse to literary and media text) as well as introspection (a production questionnaire). Unfortunately, the observation was random rather than systematic and the validity of the questionnaire results is questionable.

3. Contrastive analysis

In Chapter 3 Jakubowska presents her data in two sections: as *primary polite formulae* (address forms, greetings, farewells, thanks, apologies) and *secondary polite formulae* (compliments, congratulations, good wishes, toasts, condolences). Yet, the division does not seem convincingly motivated when all she writes is that the former "are very important for successful communication", while the latter are "less important" (p. 22).

Throughout the chapter Polish and English polite expressions are juxtaposed and compared with respect to their structure (syntactic patterns), semantic content (e.g. the use of adjectives, the presence of the performative verb) and their function in the communicative event (e.g. the type of response they elicit, their dependence on the relationship between interlocutors).

In the review of the contrastive analysis of Polish and English polite speech acts I wish to focus on the discussion of forms of address. The author classifies them as primary polite formulae, and justifiably so if only because – particularly in the Polish language – their deictic function makes them an essential part of most interaction-oriented utterances.

The account of the Polish forms *pan/pani* is rather confusing and full of inaccuracies.

Jakubowska classifies *pan/pani* as titles, which can combine with other address forms such as surnames, first names and professional titles. As such, they could be contrasted with the English forms *Mr/Mrs (Ms.)*, as in both languages the forms in

question occur in vocative phrases. However, Jakubowska does not make it clear that perhaps the more common context for *pan/pani* is when the form occurs on its own, integrated into the syntactic structure of the utterance.[1] It would then be most appropriately translated by means of the English *sir/ma'am*. For example: *Szkoda, że zapomniał pan zabrać parasol.* 'It is a pity that you (sir) have forgotten to take an umbrella.'

The above-mentioned two types of context for *pan/pani* demonstrate how the form (and other address forms, for that matter) can be aptly described in terms of the distinction between 'bound' (i.e. syntactically integrated – the latter) and 'free' (i.e. vocative – the former) address (see Svennung 1958, Schubert 1986, Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak 1992). I think the use of this distinction would make Jakubowska's comparison less confusing.

Another interesting issue, which Jakubowska does not discuss, is the grammatical status of the Polish forms *pan* and *pani* as either nouns or pronouns (see Stone 1981; Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak 1992). Considering this could help to clarify why *pan/pani* may indeed, in some contexts, correspond to the English forms *master/mistress*. Historically, *pan* derives from nominal phrases (notably *Wasza Miłość Mój Miłościwy Pan* (see Stone 1985), used both in bound and free address,) and may be described as having later undergone the process of pronominalization, which brought it to become – in address usage – the grammatical alternative to the second person pronoun *ty* 'you'. This alternative (*ty* vs. *pan/pani*) can be viewed as the Polish version of the well-known T/V distinction in address, common in many other European languages and significantly contrasting with (i.e. missing from) English address.

It would, I think, be much more insightful to describe the Polish address system (and compare it with English) in terms of the T/V distinction. Instead, Jakubowska awkwardly juxtaposes the vocative phrase *proszę pani/pana* with *ty* 'you', the second person singular pronoun, hardly ever occurring in the vocative. In claiming that "The form *proszę pani/pana* 'please sir/ma'am' is commonly used whenever the use of FN or *ty* 'you': sg would be considered improper." (p. 46) Jakubowska is wrong or inaccurate in three ways. For one thing, she confuses the reader by reversing the order of *sir/ma'am* in the English translation thus suggesting *pani* is equivalent to *sir*. Even if this minor mistake is ignored, it is still questionable whether the Polish phrase *proszę pani/pana* can be functionally translated into English as *please, ma'am/sir*. Thirdly, and more importantly, Jakubowska inaccurately implies that *proszę pani/pana* (or even just *pani/pan* within the phrase, as in 2a-c.) can be replaced with the first name (FN) or the pronoun *ty*. Consider the following examples:

(1a)   Proszę pana, czy mogę wyjść na chwilkę?
      'Excuse me, sir, could I leave for a moment?')

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[1] Strangely, the phrase *proszę pana/pani* is considered "the most neutral form of address" (p. 45).

(1b)   ?Ty, czy mogę wyjść na chwilkę?
      ?'You! Could I leave for a moment?'

(1c)   Krzysztof, czy mogę wyjść na chwilkę?
      'Chris, could I leave for a moment?'

(2a)   Proszę pani, którędy dojść do dworca?
      'Excuse me, madam, how do I get to the station?'

(2b)   ?Proszę ciebie, którędy dojść do dworca?
      ?'Excuse me, you, how do I get to the station?'

(2c)   ?Proszę Basi, którędy dojść do dworca?
      'Excuse me, Basia, how do I get to the station?'

What Jakubowska means is probably that the vocative phrase *proszę pani/pana* does not co-occur with sentences using *ty* (cf. 3a below) (or, more frequently, the verb marked for 2nd person singular, cf. 3b), but may only combine with *pani/pan* used in bound address (3c).

(3a)   ?Proszę pani, ty chyba żartujesz!
      'Ma'am, you must be joking!'

(3b)   ?Proszę pana, zapomniałeś o parasolu!
      'Sir, you have forgotten your umbrella.'

(3c)   Proszę pani, napisała pani wspaniałą książkę!
      'Ma'am, you (ma'am) have written a woderful book!'

(Once again the distinction between bound and free address would be useful in describing the patterns of usage.[2])

Finally, in the quote above, as well as in many other comments in her account of Polish address, Jakubowska seems to equate the social meanings of the use of FN and *ty* (second person singular pronoun). In fact, as convincingly demonstrated by Jaworski (1992), the semantics of the two are markedly different and, in particular, a shift from reciprocal *pan/pani* to *ty* marks a shift from formality to informality,

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[2] Jakubowska comes close to making the distinction with respect to the use of titles: "All Polish titles can appear both in the vocative ... and in the nominative (e.g. Czy Pan Profesor napije się kawy? ('Will (you) Mr Professor have a cup of coffee?')), where they function as the subject of the sentence uttered, followed by the 3 sg. verb." (p. 49). However, she does not mention that titles, and indeed other address forms, may as well function as objects and attributes. Moreover, Jakubowska implicitly acknowledges the need for the bound/free distinction when she writes that the phrase *przepraszam pana/panią* "is both a way of addressing H and a form of apology for interruption" (p. 45). The difference could, I think, be better captured by saying that in the former case the phrase serves the vocative function (i.e. it is a summons), while in the latter it is a performative speech act which merely incorporates *pan/pani* as bound address forms to refer to the addressee.

while switching from *pan/pani* to FN indicates an increase of intimacy between interlocutors.

If the use of FN in Polish involves much more intimacy than it does in English, as Jakubowska herself admits, then it is hard to agree with her claim (after Wierzbicka 1991) that in Polish "The move from the reciprocal *pan/pani* to reciprocal FN takes quite a long time, as Poles are extremely status-conscious." (p. 47). It seems more likely that switching to FN address may take longer due to Polish speakers' reluctance to allow for much more intimacy rather than to give up the high status marking.

In the final part of the section devoted to address Jakubowska recognizes the relevance of the verb form as a marker of formality. *Pan/pani* and titles co-occur with the third person singular verb form. With respect to address in the family, the author refers to the claim by Pisarkowa (1979) that the use of the third person verb with ascending kinship terms is "almost gone" (p. 52). Apparently, Jakubowska's own data are too scanty to verify this vague generalization. Neither does she refer to relevant work by other authors (e.g. Tomczak 1991; cf. also Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak 1999).

The major weakness of the analysis is the lack of any description of the data corpus. No information is given about its size and structure, and we tacitly assume the examples which illustrate the analysis, unless it is indicated otherwise, come from Jakubowska's database. Thus, the reader is left to guess that greetings like "Powitać szanowną panią." (p. 54) or "Jak tam się wiedzie?" (p. 57), though intuitively hard to accept, are examples of authentic discourse, noted down by the author during her research.

The analysis is full of quantitative claims, e.g. "Poles often use..." (p. 58); "their responses ... now tend more often to be positive" (p. 58); "the Polish ... forms are significantly less frequent and less formulaic than the English ones" (p. 60); "It is quite frequent in Polish that ... " (p. 62). Unfortunately, no reference is ever made to the frequency of forms occurring in the corpus collected by the author.[3]

When the author repeats after Ronowicz (1995) that "Poles apologize less often than native speakers of English for trifles", one would expect a contrastive analysis like Jakubowska's to verify such claims on the basis of her corpus. Similarly, expressions of politeness are often described as "the most neutral" (p. 71) or "very elegant" (p.62) but it is not clear how these judgements are derived from the informants' responses. There is no description of any instrument that Jakubowska used to elicit such "ratings" from her informants.

The book is well designed, the numerous examples consistently formatted and numbered (with only a few mistakes in referring to particular items, e.g. on page 50: 26h. should be 24h; on page 45: 4 should be 4c.). The frequent use of abbreviations is a little burdensome. In particular, the application of lower case symbols like *cp*

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[3] Other examples include: "Poles are much more reserved in giving praise" (p. 82), "in Polish direct compliments are never used" (p. 82), "The more formal the relationship between interlocutors is, the more white lies they use." (p. 87).

(for 'contrastive pragmatics') as opposed to upper case *CP* (for 'cooperative principle') confuses the reader and forces him/her to refer back to the lengthy list of abbreviations all too frequently.

Finally, the extensive list of references is a rich source of relevant literature on the subject (although articles published in journals are listed without reference to the page numbers, which is a (minor) practical problem for many who might wish to locate the sources.)

4. Conclusion

In spite of all the critical remarks expressed above and the numerous reservations about the value of the book in the functions listed in the beginning of this review, Jakubowska's book may be acclaimed for having achieved some of its goals. The author set out to provide a ("purely descriptive", p. 103) pragmatic contrastive analysis of Polish and English polite verbal behaviour. The analysis includes interesting elements of comparison in the area of syntax and semantics. Furthermore, I do agree with the author that "it may also be useful for teachers of English as a second language, making them specially aware of some linguistic and cultural features regarded as baffling, and for their learners, helping them not only to learn some pragmatic knowledge of English but also to open their eyes to some pragmatic aspects of their NL." (pp. 103-104). In particular, the author does a lot to clarify the doubts that Poles often have about the sincerity of English polite formulae (e.g. invitation-like forms which are in fact only "statements of good intention" p. 60) and she shows how congratulations, compliments or good wishes are sometimes a mere convention rather than sincere expressions supporting the addressee's face.

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